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May 27, 1999

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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF COUNSEL RULES DOCKET

FAA-2000-7952-23

Federal Aviation Administration
Office of the Chief Counsel
Attention: Rules Docket (AGC-200), **Docket No. 28293**
Room 915G
800 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20591

SUBJECT: Service Difficulty Reports (SDR's), Supplemental Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

Gentlemen, Madam;

The Regional Airline Association (RAA) submits the following response to the subject proposed rule on behalf of its membership (Attachment A). RAA encouraged its members to submit comments directly to the docket. RAA comments should be considered as supplemental to any comments individually submitted to the docket by RAA members.

RAA supports the submittal of SDR reports electronically since we recognize that the SDR system will become a more effective tool for tracking and analyzing mechanical malfunction trends. RAA members have spent millions of dollars in man-hours over the last 40 years in providing SDR data to the FAA with little or no benefit to the regional industry. In the past, the air carriers provided the SDR data to the FAA on paper and the FAA in turn published the data in huge paper documents several months later. For the most part the SDR reports were largely unread because it was not cost effective to invest in the additional labor costs needed to place the data into a format where it could readily be analyzed. The communication links that exist between the air carriers and the manufacturers in reporting and analyzing data is much more effective and will continue to remain the principal tool in ensuring that mechanical malfunctions cannot diminish aviation safety.

For the last several years numerous air carriers have been providing SDR data to the FAA in computer generated formats. We see that this benefits both the air carriers and the FAA and therefore we support the changes to require air carriers to submit the reports in an electronic form.

RAA is concerned however that several changes of the proposed rule are more administrative than regulatory in nature. While RAA recognizes that the computer programs demand "exactness" for them to run properly, we are reluctant to endorse the additional data requirements as a mandated rule since we view their safety value as non existent. RAA considers that the existing SDR data that is placed into an electronic data base composed of data fields, is all that is needed to make the existing SDR system productive. We do not agree that several of the proposed rule changes will add value to the process.

While we are not aware of the FAA ever levying a fine on an air carrier for not completely filling out the SDR data form, we are nonetheless concerned that by placing more "administrative rules" into the regulations, the air carriers will be exposed to potential fines for technically violating a rule. To an air carrier, "a rule is a rule" and technical violations of a rule cannot be taken lightly. Unless there is some language provided in the rule that allows an operator the opportunity to decide which of the "administrative" information is not needed for a comprehensive data submittal, the air carriers will need to supply all of the data regardless of cost. The FAA is simply "watering down" the rulemaking process by suggesting that these changes are necessary for air safety.

RAA requests that 121.703/125.409/ 135.415(i) provisions be rewritten as follows:

> **"When a certificate holder gets additional information concerning a report required by this section, the certificate holder shall expeditiously submit that information as a supplement to the original report unless the previously submitted information is sufficiently descriptive for analysis of the failure, malfunction or defect."**

Data must be timely to be of any value to the safety process. RAA recognizes that the current rule does not now provide the relief that RAA suggests but believe that the air carriers should be able to decide within the rulemaking process whether sufficient information has been provided. RAA is particularly concerned about the proposed provisions stating the requirements for data on both components and parts (see discussion below) and the length of time and man-hours needed to provide such information.

RAA requests that the word "component" in FAR 121.703(e)(9)/ 125.409(e)(9)/ 135.415(e)(9) be revised to "component part" and that provision (10) be deleted.

RAA assumes that the intent of provision (10) is not to provide two separate reports for one malfunction but to provide two fields of information. However in describing the intent of adding Sections 121.703(e)(10), 125.409(e)(10), and 135.415(e)(10), the *supplementary information* provides only one example of a generator and bearing and describes the data on the bearing as "necessary for accurate trend analysis". Recent *FAA SDR report summaries* provide one field for a component and one field for a part for the each malfunction and for the most part, the air carriers are currently providing one or the other field. RAA believes the current practice of providing one field or another is sufficient, particularly for the FAA's example of a generator and a bearing. The initial SDR report for the generator would first be provided since the generator would first be removed and sent to a repair shop. After the generator is repaired, the air carrier would be able to identify the "cause of failure" as a failed bearing and amend the SDR report on

the generator. Once the generator is identified, the bearing within the generator is readily identified by the operator's maintenance manual. All the information is readily available to analyze a trend in bearing failures without providing all the manufacturing information on the bearing. If this data is ever later analysed, the analyst can readily obtain from other sources all the information on the bearing that he/she needs. The FAA should clarify that operators do not have to submit more than one report for one each malfunction since by reading the rule alone, it is not that clear. What do the air carriers do when several parts fail within a component? Should the air carriers submit multitude amendments, one for each failed part within the component, including the component? RAA strongly opposes such a suggestion. There must come a time where the submittal of enough data is enough and RAA believes that it should be the air carrier who decides where enough multiple reports for a separate malfunction becomes redundant and unnecessary for analysis.

RAA requests that the following provisions be deleted from Sections 121.703/125.409/ 135.415 and from Sections 121.704/125.410/ 135.416:

> **The applicable Joint Aircraft System/Component Code;**
>
> **A unique control number for the occurrence, in a form acceptable to the Administrator.**

RAA views the entry of the JASC code as an optional field. It is simply another field for sorting out information. It is duplicative of the provision identifying the component/part and component/part location. Since it is administrative in nature, it should be recommended as a data entry field in an Advisory Circular. Most air carriers have previously provided the ATA (JASC) code without a mandated rule and we would expect that this practice would continue without a rule. Also, the proposed requirement to mandate a unique control number is another redundant, non-critical code for sorting data. If the original report is later revised, the other informational fields identifying the date, part name and number, etc. remains so that during the sorting process, it will be obvious in the analysis, that the later entry is a revision. Again a unique control number should simply be recommended in an Advisory Circular. Based on past experience, most air carriers will provide a unique code but it should not be mandated as a rule.

The cost benefit analysis is ambiguous on the added cost of the changes.

The FAA cost benefit analysis concludes that "on average, it would cost each air carrier $15 per year and each repair station $1 per year" to implement the proposed changes. This analysis fails to recognize the significance of specifying the data required in a rule versus an Advisory Circular and the proposal to develop multiple reports for components and parts. It also fails to recognize the relative "safety value" of the SDR system.

The proposed rule will mandate additional fields with which the data can be sorted out and these additional fields will be provided at the expense of the air carriers. RAA views these additional fields as redundant to the sorting process but if they are adopted, they will have to be provided because after all, they are a rule. RAA estimates that the JASC code and unique control number will add at least 5% to the air carrier's processing costs. If multiple amendments are required for

parts within components, then RAA estimates that the processing costs will increase by 100% to 200% since the number of reports could easily double or triple. Since other information is now proposed to be mandated by rule, RAA estimates that the air carriers cost of processing SDR data will increase by 20% even if the RAA recommendations are accepted.

Most Airworthiness Directives are as a result of an air carrier communicating information to a manufacturer on a component part failure and the subsequent analysis by either the manufacturer or the air carrier that mandatory remedial action is required. The SDR system is seldom used in the decision making process either because the SDR information comes too late or the data (in a flat file format) is unworkable. RAA agrees with the FAA that conversion of SDR into an electronic format can make the SDR system more valuable but it depends on how fast the FAA converts the data and provides it into a readily accessible data base for use by the industry. RAA believes however that even with the changes, it will only verify the information that has already been communicated between the air carrier and the manufacturer. It will continue to remain as a "secondary tool" in determining airworthiness issues.

Your consideration of the comments and requests of RAA and its member's, is appreciated.

Sincerely,

David Lotterer
Vice President - Technical Services

Attachment A

ATTACHMENT A

Company	City, State
Aeromar	Mexico City, DF*
Air Midwest	Wichita, KS
AirNet Systems	Columbus, OH
Air Nova	Enfield, Nova Scotia, Canada*
Air Ontario	London, Ontario*
Air Serv	Redlands, CA
Air Wisconsin	Appleton, Wis
Allegheny	Middletown, PA
American Eagle	Dallas, TX
Atlantic Coast Airlines	Dulles, VA
Atlantic Southeast	Atlanta, GA
Austin Express	Austin, TX
Big Sky Airlines	Billings, MT
Business Express	Dover, NH
Cape Air	Hyannis, MA
CCAIR	Charlotte, NC
Champlain Air	Plattsburgh, NY
hautauqua Airlines	Indianapolis, IN
Colgan Air	Manassas, VA
Comair	Cincinnati, OH
CommutAir	Plattsburgh, NY
Community Air	Ukiah, CA
Continental Express	Houston, TX
Corporate Air	Billings, Montana
Corporate Express	Nashville, TN
Eagle Aviation	Las Vegas, NV
Empire Airlines	Coeur d'Alene, ID
ERA Aviation	Anchorage, AS
Executive Airlines Inc.	San Juan, P.R.
Executive Airlines	Farmingdale, NY
Express Airlines I	Memphis, TN
Falcon Express	Tulsa, OK
Federal Express	Memphis, TN
First Air	Dallas, TX
Grand Canyon	Grand Canyon, AZ
Great Lakes Aviation	Bloomington, MN
Gulfstream Int'l	Miami Springs, FL
orizon Air	Seattle, WA
and Air	Honolulu, HI
Kitty Hawk Air Cargo	DFW Airport, TX
Mesa Air Group	Phoenix, AZ
Mesaba	Minneapolis, MN
Midway Airlines	RDU Int'l Airport, NC
Ozark Airlines	Columbia, MO
Pan Pacific	Mount Vernon, WA
Piedmont Airlines	Salisbury, MD
PSA Airlines	Vandalia, OH
Scenic Airlines	N. Las Vegas, NV
Seaborne Aviation	Christiansted, USVI
Servicios Aereos Litoral	San Antonio, TX *
Sedona (Aaron)	Seattle, WA
Shuttle America	Windsor Locks, CT
Skymark	Spokane, WA
Skyway Airlines	Oak Creek WI
Skywest	St. George, UT
Specialized Transport Int'l	Melbourne, FL
Sunworld Int'l Airlines	Ft. Mitchell, KY
Tie Aviation	Jamaica, NY
Triton Air	Mesa, AZ
UFS	St. Louis, MO
Universal Airways	Houston, TX
Walker's Int'l	Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Wiggins Airways	Norwood, MA
Wings Airways	Blue Bell, PA

* foreign based air carrier